United Nations

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Food and Agriculture Organization issues "special alert", seeking immediate aid for Iraq where, it says, people are on brink of famine.

- United Nations Legal Counsel tells Governing Council of Compensation Commission that losses and damage are still occurring in Kuwait.

- The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator reports current funding shortfall of some $214 million for humanitarian operations in the Gulf.

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The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today issued a "special alert" to donors to meet the immediate priority needs of Iraq where, it says, the food supply situation is deteriorating rapidly and people are "on the brink of famine".

According to FAO Director-General, Edouard Saouma, "suitable arrangements should be urgently worked out to enable Iraq to finance the purchase of its basic food imports for 1991-1992, estimated at a cost of $2.64 billion".

A United Nations inter-agency mission, which visited Iraq from 29 June to 13 July, estimated the cereal harvest in 1991 at 1.25 million tons, about a third of last year's record harvest. Livestock numbers have been almost halved and the poultry sector decimated. The mission also found that average food prices had increased considerably (48 times for wheat, 22 times for rice and 20 times for vegetable oil) and the nutritional status of the population was on the decline.

The FAO Director-General warned that "the information provided by the inter-agency mission clearly demonstrates a widespread and acute food crisis which, if not averted through timely intervention, will gradually cause massive starvation throughout the country". The mission set minimum rehabilitation costs for the agricultural sector sector at $500 million.

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For information media—not an official record

The Governing Council of the United Nations Compensation Commission, which will administer the payment of war reparations for losses resulting from Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, began a two-week meeting in Geneva today.

This morning's meeting was opened by the United Nations Legal Counsel, Carl-August Fleischhauer, who was there as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Mr. Fleischhauer told the meeting that "the principal task of the Compensation Commission is to administer the Fund from which compensation will be made for claims arising out of direct losses, damage, including environmental damage and the depletion of natural resources, or injury to foreign Governments, nationals and corporations as a result of Iraq's unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait".

He said the losses and damages were still occurring and that the burning of scarce natural resources, which were set on fire, was causing immense damage and immeasurable risk to the environment and accumulating financial losses to the people and the State of Kuwait.

According to the Legal Counsel, hundreds of thousands of ordinary people had also been severely victimized, including enormous numbers of foreign workers who lost their jobs, lodgings and often all their belongings as a consequence of the occupation. These workers, who were compelled to leave the Gulf area, now constituted a social and economic burden for their countries of origin which had lost the remittances these nationals used to send home, he said, adding that the Council should bear this aspect of its task in mind when establishing the priorities of its work.

The Governing Council has also set guidelines for the presentation and evaluation of claims. The Council is composed of representatives of the current 15 members of the Security Council.

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The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) has reported a current funding shortfall of some $214 million for humanitarian operations in the Gulf, out of a total budget of over $460 million.

According to a financial report issued on 22 July, the funding of refugee and repatriation projects is short $115 million. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) faces a shortfall of over $95 million -- nearly half of its budget for the area. The FAO is experiencing one of the most critical financial situations, with a shortfall of $43 million out of a total budget of $44 million.

The United Nations guards project, says the report, has been pledged or received more than $46 million, with a deficit totalling over $18 million. The UNDRO reports that a total of 291 guards are currently in place in Iraq. The European Economic Commission (EEC) has indicated its readiness, in principle, to pay the balance of the cost of the United Nations guard project.

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